Dynamic Statism and Memory Politics: A Case Analysis of the Chinese War Reparations Movement*

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ABSTRACT This study addresses the Chinese Second World War victims' reparations movement (CWRM) against Japan as a case of contemporary Chinese memory politics. While many studies indicate the Chinese government's use of the war memories for political purposes, ours focuses on how official discourses are translated into citizens' political participation and how the state–society interactions lead to variation in the development of the movement sectors within the case of CWRM. Drawing on textual and ethnographic data and a theoretical "dynamic statism," we argue that the central government's ambivalent attitude towards this ideologically useful yet institutionally troublesome movement created room for local governments and the movement to pursue their own causes. Yet the local and central governments' strong interventions, either facilitation or repression, discouraged civil society's participation and led to the underdevelopment of some movement sectors. In the sectors where the local governments held an attitude of absenteeism or co-operation, the movement was able to mobilize resources from civil society and state institutions and finally developed well.

In recent decades, the role of Second World War memories in East Asian regional politics has attracted scholars' attention.[1] The most prominent cases pertaining to China include the debate over the Japanese prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, the contested memories of the Nanjing Massacre, the 2005 anti-Japanese demonstrations, and the decade-long reparations litigation against Japan. Since wars and war memories are fundamental to nation-states and

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1 Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (eds.), *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2007); Joshua A. Fogel (ed.), *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2000); James Reilly, "China's history activists and the war of resistance against Japan: history in the making," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2004), pp. 276–94; Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

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nationalism,[2] these issues converge with the heated discussions about Chinese nationalism and the "rise of China."[3]

Much has been learned about the Chinese government's mythological and strategic use of the past through constructing historic narratives and establishing commemorative sites. Memories of the anti-Japanese war, the studies suggest, are used as a bargaining chip in diplomatic negotiations with Japan[4] and as a convenient tool to construct legitimacy that can no longer be provided by the fading communism.[5] Less has been studied and theorized, however, about how official war memories generate discursive opportunity for citizens' political participation and how their actions are enabled and constrained by their dynamic relations to governments at different levels and regions. Until these issues are addressed, politics of the war memories as a large-scale social phenomenon cannot be adequately understood.

This article intends to redress this imbalance by studying one of the most influential cases, the Chinese war reparations movement between 1991 and 2007 (*duiRi suopei yundong* 对日索赔运动, CWRM), in which Second World War victims demanded reparations from Japan. This case is significant and intriguing not only because it is the most persistent Chinese social movement based on collective memory (more than a decade) but also because its trajectory and variation enable us to see memory politics at different levels of society. Our study draws on data collected from ethnographic research in addition to conducting a conventional textual analysis. We propose a "dynamic statism" to account for the variations that cannot be adequately explained by previous studies. Why, among the six major movement sectors in the CWRM, did some sectors develop better than others? Why did the sectors with more governmental support not always develop well? What does this variation tell us about the state–society relationship in contemporary China?

Memory Politics and the State–Society Relationship

A traditional approach to politics of memory is to highlight the role of the state.[6] The formation and development of modern nation-states is intertwined with

2 Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

3 Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.), *China Rising: Nationalism and Interdependence* (London: Routledge, 1997).

4 Jessica C. Weiss, "Powerful patriots: nationalism, diplomacy and the strategic logic of anti-foreign protest," doctoral thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2008.

5 Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese realpolitik," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (1996), pp. 37–52, "China, the US–Japan alliance, and the security dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4. (1999), pp. 49–80; Yinan He, "Remembering and forgetting the war: elite mythmaking, mass reaction, and Sino-Japanese relations, 1950–2006," *History & Memory*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2007), pp. 43–74; Rana Mitter, "Old ghosts, new memories: China's changing war history in the era of post-Mao politics," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2003), pp. 117–31; Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, "Legitimacy and the limits of nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1998), pp. 114–46; Zheng Wang, "National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: patriotic education campaign in China," *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 52 (2008), pp. 783–806.

6 John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

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discovering ethnic roots and forging national identity,[7] inventing a tradition to legitimize itself, especially when the state is newly formed or in a transition period,[8] and, in extreme cases, as George Orwell vividly describes in *1984*, "controlling" the present by controlling the past.[9] It has also been indicated that authoritarian and totalitarian states tend to be more interested in and capable of manipulating commemorations, rituals and other forms of symbolic politics.[10]

Most current studies of contemporary Chinese memory politics follow this line by focusing on intentions and strategies of the Chinese government's use of war memories. They attend to three aspects of war memories: as domestic legitimation, as a diplomatic strategy, and as narratives embodied in texts and commemorative sites. For example, one of the most recent and representative studies, Yinan He's research on war memory and international politics in China,[11] examines how the Chinese government exploited memories of the anti-Japanese war to enhance domestic legitimacy and obtain diplomatic leverage. This manipulation of memory stirred radical nationalistic sentiments and a one-sided view of Japan among the young generation. Therefore, the anti-Japanese nationalist movement since the 1990s has been a result of the state's propaganda and "patriotic education." Studies of historical narratives and commemorative sites, such as war memorials and museums, also stress the state's explicit or implicit strategy of either mythologizing heroic history or constructing victimhood.[12] Similar arguments with different degrees of emphasis on the state's symbolic functions can be found in studies of Chinese nationalism and the anti-Japanese protests, both of which are based on war memories.[13] These studies have enriched our understanding of memory politics as a way of establishing hegemony of the state.

On the other hand, war memory issues in contemporary China, as in many other places in the world, are usually translated into political action at society level, such as small- and large-scale demonstrations against Japan, online

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University Press, 1994); Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Jeffrey K. Olick (ed.), *States of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

7 Smith, *Myths and Memories*.

8 Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

9 George Orwell, *1984: a Novel* (New York: New American Library, 1983), p. 35. Also see Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1980) for an example of public discourse and Rubie S. Watson (ed.), *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism* (Sante Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994) for scholarly research.

10 James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 67–86; Watson, *Memory, History, and Opposition*; Cristel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Mable Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: the Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

11 Yinan He, "Remembering and forgetting the war."

12 Mitter, "Old ghosts, new memories"; Rana Mitter, "Behind the scenes at the museum: nationalism, history and memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997," *The China Quarterly*, No. 161 (2000), pp. 279–93.

13 Shirk, *China*; Weiss, *Powerful Patriots*.

protests, and social movements. We already have adequate knowledge about the government's role in memory issues, but we know less about how and why the state-forged memories lead to different patterns of political action in different contexts and what these variations reveal about the Chinese state–society relationship.

Methodologically, scholars rely almost exclusively on discourses of the past that are embodied in texts, arts, and commemorative sites. These sources of data might be valid to investigate the state's intentions and propaganda strategies, as well as political processes at the international level, but they may not adequately explain Chinese nationalism and memory politics as an influential social phenomenon. A few studies of memory and nationalism do use textual data from non-state media, popular books and online discussions, and hence give more room for voices different from the official discourses.[14] We follow them and develop this line of research by using ethnographic data to examine memory politics as collective actions instead of as pure discourses.

Following the recent trend in collective memory study that shifts the research subject from "memory" to "mnemonic practices,"[15] our study focuses more on Chinese citizens' participation in memory politics and their nuanced relationships with the state. The best way to address this issue, we believe, is to marry collective memory to state–society interactions in social movement theories and Chinese politics literature. Specifically, we build our study on a more flexible and situational view of the political opportunity structure (POS).[16] We follow a "dynamic statism," a view that stresses the dynamics and variations in the state–society relationship. This approach "allows us to specify political opportunity for different actors and sectors, to track its changes over time, and to place the analysis of social movements in their increasingly transnational setting."[17] Scholars working on Chinese contentious politics also cherish this approach without using this theoretical label.[18] They indicate that, even in an authoritarian context, the

14 Christopher R. Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Simon Shen, *Redefining Nationalism in Modern China: Sino-American Relations and the Emergence of Chinese Public Opinion in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Peter Gries, "China's 'new thinking' on Japan," *The China Quarterly*, No. 184 (2005), pp. 831–50.

15 Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: on Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

16 See the chapters in J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Also, an important trend in the POS approach is to emphasize interaction contexts and variations in POS. See Hanspeter Kriesi, "Political context and opportunity," in D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, and H. Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 67–90.

17 Sidney Tarrow, "States and opportunities: the political structuring of social movements," in D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 41–61.

18 To name just a few, among many others: Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Tony Saich, "Negotiating the state: the development of social organizations in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 161 (2000), pp. 124–41;

state–society relationship is layered and varies across regions, and local government and movements have more leeway on some issues than others.[19] We want to extend this conventional wisdom to the issue of memory politics. The new thing we add to the literature is that we see state-constructed memory as the discursive aspect of POS,[20] examining crevices and "grey zones" between the ideological and organizational aspects of POS. All these are realized in situation-specific interactions between the movement and the state. This dynamic and differential feature of POS finally leads to sector variation in a single case of collective memory movement.

The following sections illustrate these theoretical points in the empirical case of the CWRM, which consists of several sectors with different degrees of development.

The Case and Methods: The Chinese War Reparations Movement

The Chinese war reparations movement is deeply rooted in the history and memory of the Second World War. In 1972, when normalizing its diplomatic relationship with Japan, the People's Republic of China gave up official claims for war reparations in a joint communiqué with Japan. In the early 1990s, a few Chinese activists asserted that Chinese citizens have the right to demand compensation from Japan because they believed the communiqué could be applied only to state reparations but not to individual citizens. Those activists mobilized victims and supporters and petitioned to change foreign policy, urging the government to clarify the issue, or, more precisely, to confirm their claims. Nevertheless, these attempts were not successful.[21]

Around 1995, some new activists filed a series of lawsuits against the Japanese government and the corporations that used forced labour during the war. This proved a turning point for the CWRM, and since then the movement has

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Peter Hays Gries, "Popular nationalism and state legitimation in China," in P. H. Gries and S. Rosen (eds.), *State and Society in 21st-Century China* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 180–94.

19 Saich, "Negotiating the state"; Yongshun Cai, "Local governments and the suppression of popular resistance in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 193 (2008), pp. 24–42.

20 Ruud Koopmans and Susan Olzak, "Discursive opportunities and the evolution of right-wing violence in Germany," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 110, No. 1 (2004), pp. 298–330; Holly J. McCammon, Courtney Sanders Muse, Harmony D. Newman and Teresa M. Terrell, "Movement framing and discursive opportunity structures: the political successes of the US women's jury movements," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (2007), pp. 725–49.

21 In 1991, Tong Zeng, a legal scholar, wrote a "ten-thousand-word-letter" to some representatives to the National People's Congress, petitioning to ask reparations from Japan. Some of the representatives did raise a motion to the NPC, yet the efforts were not successful. Chinese sources can be found in Wang Ronghuan, "9/18: six rounds of civil reparations," *Fazhi shibao* (*Legal Service Times*), 12 September 2003. Tong's "ten-thousand-word-letter" can be found in various websites, e.g. http://news.sohu.com/97/45/news146314597.shtml. English reports can be found in "Chinese hardliners to demand war compensations from Japan," *Japan Economic Newswire*, Kyodo News Service, 9 March 1992 and various other news agencies.

grown rapidly. Some Japanese lawyers affiliated with the Japanese Peace Movement contributed to this new phase of activities by searching for Chinese Second World War victims and encouraging them to sue Japan. They worked with local and national activists, most of whom are lawyers, historians and volunteer activists. The movement declined and almost came to a halt after April 2007, when the Japanese Supreme Court ruled that all reparations cases from China should be rejected according to the Court's interpretation of the 1972 Sino-Japanese communiqué.

We began to be interested in this movement in 2006 and started our research by collecting textual data. The first author also conducted a two-month (June to July 2007), interview-based ethnographic study in several locations in China where the CWRM occurs. He conducted 24 formal, recorded individual interviews and numerous informal interviews, such as casual conversations over dinner.[22] In the formal interviews, the respondents were asked about their demographic information, their engagement in the movement and their narratives about relationships with other parties in the movement. He also conducted two focus group interviews with victims and activists in two locations,[23] as well as participant observations of some events.[24] We want to highlight the necessity of the field study to our project not only because many nuances in state–society interactions are unavailable in public sources but also because fieldwork can keep theorizing "close to the ground."[25] Before, during and after the fieldwork, we also collected various types of textual data: media reports in both English and Chinese[26]; several Chinese books focusing on the movement, including documentary history and scholarly discussions of legal issues[27]; online reports and discussions in some websites and an email listserv[28]; and unpublished documents collected during the

22 This number does not include many informal conversations with legal scholars and historians working on reparations and Second World War issues.

23 Changde, June 2007, and Yiwu, June 2007.

24 One commemoration ritual held by Chongqing victims and activists, 5 June 2007; one meeting of an SMO in Beijing, 24 June 2007; a conference held by bacterial weapon victims and activists in Shanghai, 6–8 July 2007; an exhibition about the "comfort women" in a university in Shanghai, 6 July 2007. The first author also did participant observations of numerous informal activities, such as dinners, encounters and casual talks.

25 Kevin J. O'Brien, "Discovery, research (re) design and theory building," in Maria Heimer and Stig Thogersen (eds.), *Doing Fieldwork in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 37.

26 We collected reports about CWRM from Chinese and English media published in Japan, Europe and the United States. The Chinese reports are collected through China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI, www.cnki.net), traditional library collections in Shanghai and Hangzhou, online news portals such as www.sina.com.cn, and some websites established by people related to the movement, such as http://www.sjhistory.net. We divided the reports into state core media (such as the *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency, which reflect the state's attitude towards the movement) and state-sponsored media (with more diverse and less carefully designed reports). English media reports are collected through www.lexisnexis.com.

27 Liu Yalin and Gong Jigang, *Xijun zhan shouhaizhe suopei* (*The Bacterial Warfare Victims' Litigation*) (Changsha, China: Hunan renmin ribao. 2004), Nan Xianghong, *Wang Xuan de banian kangzhan* (*Wang Xuan's Eight-year Resistance War*) (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi ribao, 2005). Also see a two-volume collection of scholarly articles about war compensations: Su Zhiliang, Rong Weimu and Chen Lifei (eds.), *Riben qinghua zhanzheng yiliu wenti he peichang wenti* (*The Remaining Issues and Compensations Issue of Japanese Invasion War against China*) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2005).

28 With permission from several leading activists, the first author signed up on an email listserv of bacterial

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fieldwork, such as pamphlets, flyers, self-printed texts, copies of petitioning letters, name lists of members, investigation working manuals, meeting minutes and pictures. We cross-checked published and unpublished texts, Chinese sources and non-Chinese sources, and, most importantly, field study data and textual data to present a circumstantial and systematic account of the movement.

This article focuses on one of the most intriguing features of the CWRM after 1995, its internal variations across six major movement sectors. Each sector includes one or more lawsuits about an alleged atrocity: the bacterial weapon victims' case in Yiwu 义乌, Zhejiang province[29]; the bacterial weapon victims' case in Changde 常德, Hunan province[30]; the forced labourers' cases in north China; the "comfort women" case; the Chongqing indiscriminate bombing case; and the chemical weapon victims' case in north-east China. Some of these sectors developed better than others.[31] The bacterial weapon cases in Yiwu and Changde, in which a considerable number of activists and victims organized well-functioning social movement organizations (SMOs), were the most developed. Their financial situations were better than those of other cases, although the two cases differed from each other in the ways in which they raised funds. Compared to these two well-developed cases, the Chongqing indiscriminate bombing case has an SMO, but it has suffered from constant internal conflicts, schisms and lack of financial support. Other cases, the "comfort women," the forced labourers and the chemical weapons, have neither functioning SMOs nor a large number of regular participants (see Table 1).

One might also be surprised by the absence of the most widely known case in the war memories: the Nanjing Massacre, which had the greatest number of victims and the strongest government support, but no reparations movement.[32] Thus, the Massacre becomes a "negative case,"[33] which needs an explanation beyond official memories and discourses.

Given that the collective memory issues these sectors act on all belong to the same war memory discourse, in which the government has the same hegemonic

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warfare litigations. We monitored the discussions from June 2007 to the present. The listserv includes participants from various places, including Canada, Japan and the US.

29 For the purpose of language parsimony, we use Yiwu to represent all the movement sub-sectors in Zhejiang province. Among them, Yiwu is certainly the most prominent and representative, but it does not mean we ignore the contributions of activists in other places.

30 Changde and Yiwu share the same lawsuit, but in terms of their social movement activity, they are quite independent of each other.

31 Our measurements of development include: number of regular participants; does an SMO exist?; does it work well?; financial situation of SMO, if any. The sectors which develop better have more participants, well-functioning SMOs and better financial situations.

32 Two cases filed by the Massacre victims, Li Xiuyin and Xia Shuqing, were about the plaintiffs' "reputation." Moreover, there are no indicators of social movement (collective actions, SMOs, etc.) about the Massacre reparations.

33 "Negative case" means there is no such a phenomenon. See James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, "The possibility principle: choosing negative cases in comparative research," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (2004), pp. 653–69.

Table 1: **Outcome Variation of the CWRM after 1995**

	Yiwu	Changde	Chongqing	Comfort women	Forced labourers	Chemical weapons
Number of participants	50–60	113 (not including shared lawyers with Yiwu)	39 plaintiffs and fewer than 10 volunteers	Several scholars and lawyers	None except several lawyers	None except several lawyers
SMO	Well functioning	Well functioning	Full of conflicts, inefficient	None	Not functioning	Not functioning
Financial status	Good	Good, but sometimes lack of funding	Poor	None	Poor, relying on Japanese lawyers	Poor

interest, what can account for the variation across the sectors? To what extent is the variation linked to both discursive and institutional aspects of POS and their dynamics? The next section describes our empirical findings of the factors related to this variation, and then explains them by raising three propositions.

Empirical Findings

We raise three propositions to explain this variation. First, the "ambivalence proposition": the ideological profits in the CWRM lured the Chinese state, but at the same time it wanted to contain the threat of collective actions. Second, the "grey zone" proposition: the central government's ambivalent attitude created a "grey zone" for local governments in the places where the CWRM occurred. Local governments could improvise their strategies for dealing with the movement. Third, the "upside-down U-shaped proposition": while the government's strong support or repression discouraged civil society's participation, its co-operative strategy or absenteeism facilitated the sectors. In other words, instead of formulating the memory movement's development as a linear function of the state's repression-facilitation spectrum and/or discursive strategies, the findings in this article suggest an approximately upside-down U-shaped relation between the two.

Ambivalence

The central government has never had a written document about whether or not the 1972 communiqué article about reparations excludes individual citizens' right to demand compensation.[34] Yet, as most scholars have correctly observed, the state desired to exploit the discourses of nationalism and victimhood in the reparations issues and related collective memories of the Sino-Japanese War (1931–45). At the same time, it was cautious about the movement for two reasons. First, any collective action aggravated the state and threatened "stability"; second, even if the target was the Japanese state, the Chinese state would probably find itself being blamed

34 High-ranking foreign-service officials' comments were inconsistent and ambiguous. For example, Qian Qicheng verbally confirmed individual citizens' demand in 1992 ("Qian Qichen backs demand for Japanese war reparations," *Japanese Economic Newswire*, 23 March 1992), while Tang Jiaxuan said in 1995 that "We are not 'supporting' these people, but 'we feel sympathy' for them" ("China voices 'compassion' for war compensation calls," *Japanese Economic Newswire*, 4 April 1995). Also see "Individuals 'cannot claim war damages'," *Hong Kong Standard*, 17 December 1998. In most cases, especially in the reports on Chinese official media, the Chinese government condemns Japan courts' ruling but does not directly clarify whether individual citizens have rights to demand compensations. For example, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao claimed that the Japanese Supreme Court's statement that "the Chinese government has given up individuals' reparations right" was "illegal and invalid." The Chinese government, he said, urged Japan to "settle the issue" but still avoided the question ("the Chinese government strongly protests the Japanese Supreme's ungrounded interpretation of the article about the renouncing the war reparations in the China–Japan communique" ("Zhongfang qiangliе fandui Ri zuigao fayuan renyi jieshi Zhongguo zhengfu zai ZhongRi lianhe shenmin zhong xuanbu fangqi duiRizhanzhen peikuan yaoqiu de tiao kuan"), in the *People's Daily*, April 2007, p. 5). The background of this comment was the Japanese Supreme Court dismissing all reparations from China according to its juristic explanation. When the first author was in the field, many activists strongly criticized the Chinese government's "vague" and "clichéd" statement.

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for failing to take a strong stance in the bilateral relationship. At the first stage of the CWRM, the activists petitioned the Foreign Affairs Office and the National People's Congress to change its policy towards Japan. This strategy disturbed the state's agenda and invited suppression.[35]

After 1995 the movement's action strategy transformed from petitioning the Chinese state to taking legal action against the Japanese state. This "turning-outward" strategy significantly lowered the level of threats, and state–society interactions began unfolding mainly at the local level, between local governments (or agents of the central government) and the movement, and in transnational legal activism. Yet, evidence demonstrates that the state still held an ambiguous attitude towards the movement. Textual analysis of reports in the *People's Daily* shows that among the 34 relevant reports, there was only one marginal mention of reparations movement organizations. Ethnographic evidence supports this, too. For example, none of the SMOs gained an official status (that is none was registered with the Bureau of Civil Affairs).[36] Another example is more discursive. Chongqing's victims organization was forced to change its name from the Chongqing Bombing Victims' Demanding Reparations Organization (*Chongqing dahongzha shouhaizhe suopei tuan* 重庆大轰炸受害者索赔团) to the Chongqing Bombing Victims' Demanding Reparations Case (*Chongqing dahongzha shouhaizhe suopei an* 重庆大轰炸受害者索赔案), which does not sound like an organizational name and gives an impression that the victims are not "organizing" (*gao zuzhi* 搞组织).[37] Many interviewees also complained that National Security agents attended their meetings. However, the monitoring and constraints should not be overestimated. Most SMOs run without official status. As one of our informants explained: "Well, to permit you to exist already shows the government's attitude."[38]

The grey zone

A significant effect of this ambivalence is that the crevice between discursive and institutional dimensions created a "grey zone" in which local governments have a range of action options beyond the simple dichotomy of repression and facilitation. Local governments often received contradictory and vague signals from the central government. In most cases, a typical message was a hint, such as "Go ahead but be careful,"[39] while in a few, the central government bypassed

35 See n. 21.

36 For instance, one of the leading activists for bacterial weapon victims did try to register the SMO with Zhejiang province but did not succeed (interview with SH-1, 13 June 2007). To protect the research subjects' privacy, we use code to refer to individual interviewees.

37 The first author has a leading activist's business card, on which 索赔团 is printed but crossed out and replaced by handwritten 索赔案.

38 A casual conversation with one of the Chongqing activists. Another interview with one of the leading activists located in Yiwu also suggests this nuance (12 July 2007).

39 The bottom-line for this vague message was not to petition to the central government and not to pursue official status for the SMOs. The ethnographic evidence in all the sectors supports this observation. For example, the movement activists in Changde, who are several local officials, reported to the Foreign

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the local government and intervened through their agents. But it was usually the case that the central government's ambivalence created a "grey zone" that enabled local governments to decide on their own strategies to pursue their own interests. They could either suppress the movement for the sake of "stability," or encourage it for the sake of "patriotic education," or employ more subtle strategies to use the movement for their own purposes.

We measured the government's involvement by several indicators: whether it financially supported the movement; whether it or state organizations organized the SMOs; whether it sent personnel to the SMOs; and whether it facilitated, permitted, restricted or forbade their activities. We argue that local governments adopted five major action strategies.

First, "takeover" (in the chemical weapon and forced labourers cases). The government, either central or local, organized the SMO or did not allow SMOs at all. The major activists were assigned by the government, and non-governmental activists were not present or played only a minor role. The government was the major financial source, or there was no alternative when government funding was not available. However, the cases are used discursively by the state media.

Second, "co-operation" (in Changde). Along with governmental representatives, non-governmental activists were active in the SMO. The government financially and institutionally supported the movement but did not directly organize it. This strategy was usually adopted by local governments.

Third, "absenteeism" (in Yiwu). The local government provided the movement with no or very little financial support. The SMO was organized by non-governmental activists, and there were no governmental officials in it. Activists were allowed to engage in activities with very little government interference.

Fourth, "control" (in the "comfort women" case). The SMO was allowed to exist but was strictly monitored and restricted by the central and local governments. The government did not send personnel to the SMO but did not provide financial support either.

And finally, "suppression" (in Chongqing). SMOs were either banned or strictly controlled. Their activities were sometimes banned or at least not reported by the official media. Both central and local governments could adopt this strategy. Discursively, the cases are strictly controlled on state media; sometimes the reports on them are even banned.

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Affairs when they tried to co-operate with victims to file lawsuits. The message they got was a "yes." But when they established their organizations, they received a call from the Central Foreign Affairs and the local National Security ordering them not to give a name to this organization. In other words, the organization had to run without a name for a long time and later added a "preparation" to show its unofficial status.

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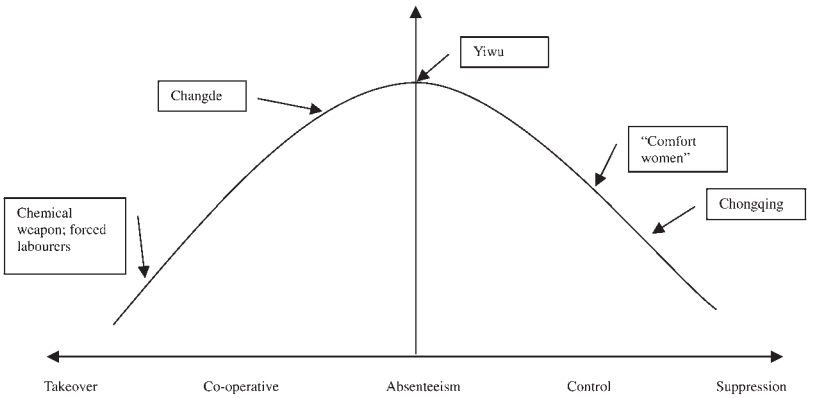
Figure 1: **Upside-down, U-Shaped Co-Variation**



An upside-down U-shaped co-variation

If this spectrum is compared to the degree of development, there is a non-linear relationship between the state's strategies and variation in the development of the sectors. In fact, it looks like an upside-down U-shaped co-variation model (see Figure 1). The local government's support and involvement did lead to a well-developed sector in Changde, but the strong presence of the central and local governments in the chemical weapon and forced labourers cases did not. The government's "control" and "suppression" impeded Chongqing and the "comfort women" case, yet they were still slightly better than the cases with the government's "takeover" strategies. Yiwu, with very little government support, developed best among these sectors.

What can account for this seemingly puzzling co-variation model? In the rest of this section, we will use rich empirical evidence to reveal the mechanisms underlying this co-variation. First, we analytically determine the major actors in the local contexts, such as local governments, sometimes agents of the central government and activists. Then we analyse their social positions, resources and mutual relationships.

We start our analysis from the sectors that developed fully and healthily, the Yiwu and Changde cases.

Yiwu

The CWRM in Yiwu was started in 1991, when a group of Japanese lawyers/activists approached the victims.[40] Some villagers were encouraged to collect

40 During the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese army used bacterial bombs and other methods to spread bubonic plague in Zhejiang and other provinces. See Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932–45 and the American Cover-Up* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

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evidence by interviewing victims and their descendants.[41] Yet, the work was intermittent and did not develop well until 1995, when Wang Xuan 王选, a Japan-educated Yiwu native, speaking both Japanese and the local dialect, joined the investigation. After she had collected oral historical evidence for two years, the victims, activists and lawyers filed lawsuits and established an SMO in 1997. A former town official co-led the organization with Wang Xuan. All our informants agreed that Wang Xuan's involvement was the critical moment for Yiwu, and even the whole CWRM. Wang insisted on the independence of victims and sometimes had squabbles with the Japanese lawyers, who tried to control the agenda to serve their own political causes.[42] Her strong stance, with the members' ability to raise funds, enabled the grassroots SMO to grow in a relatively independent manner.

The local government took an attitude of absenteeism, which was the result of long-term interactions instead of a prescribed, formal strategy. The Yiwu SMO rarely attempted to urge the state to change its foreign policy about the war reparations, and hence the central government did not press the county government to stop them. Some informants attributed this absenteeism to the role of the SMO leaders, who are former officials and trusted by the local government as "reliable people." One of the leading members of the CWRM in Yiwu had been a long-standing Party secretary of a township, a fairly high position in the local context. This political veteran understood the art of communicating with government officials: he regularly reported their activities to the county officials and sometimes invited them to meetings.[43] The officials came to the activities a few times and then did not bother to attend, even when invited.

The central and local governments' absenteeism left considerable room for the movement to grow and flourish, which was only possible, however, when the civil society had a strong base for the movement. Since the 1990s, Yiwu has transformed from a small county town to one of the richest small-scale cities in China; this stunning development took only ten years. The affluence of Yiwu activists and local civil society sustained the movement financially. The largest expense for CWRM participants, especially the victims, was trips to Japan, each of which costs about 10,000 yuan per person. This fairly large amount usually frustrated victims elsewhere. Yet the Yiwu plaintiffs managed to find support, mainly from their children and other private sources.[44]

41 Liu Yalin and Gong Jigang, *Xijun zhan shouhaizhe suopei* (*The Bacterial Warfare Victims' Litigation*) (Changsha: Hunan renmin ribao, 2004), pp. 181–82. Interviews with several informants also supported this.

42 Interview with SH-1 (13 June 2007). Other people's comments on Wang Xuan's personality and relationship with Japanese lawyers corroborate this interview (e.g. a casual talk with a Changde government official).

43 Interviews with SH-1, a leading activist for bacterial warfare victims, 13 June 2007, YW-1, a local activist, 11 July 2007, YW-3, a leading local activist, 12 July 2007.

44 The first author visited the house of one of the plaintiffs/activists. This person has a son running a successful transportation business, and the son paid for the activist's trips to Japan. The SMO also had a regulated financial system in which each branch in several locations was responsible for its own travelling expenses to Japan. Interviews with SH-1, 134 June 2007, YW-1, 11 July 2007.

Another equally important civil society factor was the local community on which the major sector is based. Many plaintiffs are physically located in a once plague-stricken village called Congshan 崇山, where the residents share the surname Wang and are related to each other. The horrible stories about the bubonic plague were transmitted through an oral tradition and articulated to the outside public by the movement. Thus, members of this memory community enthusiastically participated in the movement. They chipped in to build a small memorial in the village.[45] Most staff members of the SMO in Yiwu are from Congshan.

Changde

The second case that developed fully and healthily, in Changde, was initiated by a group of Japanese lawyers led by Wang Xuan in 1996, when they went to Changde to investigate the bacterial warfare history. The vice-director of the city Foreign Affairs Office received them, and joined the activism with the city government's permission.[46] Local officials/historians in marginal bureaus, such as the Local History Office, provided existing data. The volunteer activists took an active role in collecting more evidence from previously unknown victims. Their SMO consisted of more than 100 regular participants, mainly government officials, college teachers, volunteers from towns and villages, and victims or descendents of victims.[47] They are proud of their efficient data collection: 7,643 victims' data were systematically collected, classified and eventually confirmed by the Japanese courts. The SMO in Changde was well organized but had some financial difficulties. Some ad hoc small funds were provided by the local government to cover copying and telephone expenses, but they were intermittent and made available only when the SMO officials applied.[48]

Changde's case can be characterized by the co-operation between the local government and the movement. The city government permitted officials or former officials to be movement organizers; meanwhile, they also encouraged victims and activists to participate. Nevertheless, their intention to co-operate with the civil society was more complicated than assumed. On one hand, the SMO officials apparently acquired permission from the central government. At an early stage, when a local Foreign Affairs official desired to join the movement, she called the central Foreign Affairs Department and got a lukewarm "yes" reply.[49] Several major figures in the SMO are former high-ranking officials, who still hold important positions in a state-sponsored local college. However, as two of my informants (one former vice-mayor, one professor of the Bacterial Warfare Research Institute in the local college) admitted, the city government

45 Interview with YW-3, 12 July 2007, and participant observation.
46 Interview with CD-2, a government official, 22 July 2007.
47 Information from a roster of members of the organization.
48 Focus group interview with five activists, 21 July 2007.
49 Interview CD-2, 22 July 2007.

got involved because it intended to use the movement as a vehicle to enhance the reputation of the city, which otherwise is hardly known outside Hunan province. One of them used a distinctive word in Chinese political vocabulary to describe this intention: CWRM for Changde is a "business card."[50]

The local government's involvement provided the movement sector with a favourable political opportunity structure by consolidating the alliance between the civil society and the government. Thus the movement was able to use some governmental resources. Moreover, the officials' explicit support sent an assuring signal that encouraged more participants. One key member of the SMO was a local beer factory owner, who regularly donated money to the SMO and paid for the dinner parties that officials and key activists attended.[51] The less wealthy participants contributed to the movement by conducting interviews village by village in the rural areas in Changde. Nevertheless it would be oversimplistic to describe the alliance as seamless. During his stay in Changde, the first author heard the ordinary participants' complaints about the local college research centre for their using the evidence the participants had collected without giving them credit.[52] Yet, overall this co-operation did enable the movement to use resources and recruit participants from both the local government and the civil society.

The forced labourers and the chemical weapon cases: takeover

The cases of the forced labourers and chemical weapon victims, which were sometimes supported strongly and explicitly by the central government and sometimes by local governments, were mired in their poor development. The state's role in both cases can be characterized as "takeover," but the methods differed. In the forced labourers case, the central government bypassed the local governments, working through the state-sponsored All-China Lawyers' Association and the Red Cross to co-operate with Japanese lawyers.[53] In the chemical weapons case, the central state worked through the local government and took over the movement at an earlier stage. Nevertheless, in both, the state's involvement impeded the movement by discouraging participation from civil society and allowing political and economic interests to meddle with the movements.

This pattern was especially salient in the Hanaoka lawsuit.[54] The victims demanded compensation in the early 1990s but did not file lawsuits until 1995,

50 Activists outside Changde accused the officials of taking advantage of the opportunity to tour around Japan (interview with YW-2, 11 July 2009). Although the Changde officials denied that, it was true that the officials usually significantly outnumbered victims in the litigation "delegation" to Japan: only a couple of victims accompanied by more than 20 officials and local elites (evidence from the name lists of the delegations). Despite the SMO's financial difficulty, ironically, the officials' travel expenses to Japan were reimbursed by the local government, while the plaintiffs had to pay for themselves.

51 Interview with this entrepreneur, 22 July 2007.

52 Focus group interview with five activists, 21 July 2007.

53 The All-China Association of Lawyers sets up a special group for the reparations cases of forced labourers. See http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-08-15/00257495331.shtml for information.

54 During the Second World War, some Chinese peasants and POWs were transported to Japan and forced

when they were approached by a group of Japanese lawyers who had strong political connections with the Japanese Social Democratic Party. Since then, the case has been controlled by two groups of people: left-wing Japanese lawyers and Chinese lawyers with a strong governmental background.[55] Most of the Japanese lawyers were affiliated with a left-wing organization, the Japan–China Friendship Association, which had a strong connection to the Chinese Communist Party.[56] Both groups wanted to use Hanaoka to demonstrate their achievements in memory politics. The accused construction company, Kajima, also wanted to provide some money to solve the problem once and for all. All these factors eventually led to an "amicable agreement" by which Kajima neither admitted the facts nor made an apology to the victims. The lawyers, on behalf of the victims but without telling them details, signed the agreement, and the state-backed China Red Cross distributed the money to the victims. The official Chinese media described the agreement as "compensations and apology," and the Chinese Foreign Affairs Department soon announced that Kajima "has admitted the historical facts and expressed deep remorse to the victims and their families."[57] However, several descendants of forced labourers living in Japan discovered the rhetorical tricks; some victims protested against the agreement and criticized the Japanese lawyers. A huge debate was provoked, with most of the CWRM's leading figures on the victims' side.[58] But some victims accepted the money without complaints. The distribution work ended two years later without explanation.

The chemical weapon cases were filed by a number of victims before the "8/4 incident."[59] After the 8/4 incident, the government immediately took over the case and negotiated with Japan, with whom China co-signed the Chemical

footnote continued

to work in horrible conditions. Almost half of them died in Japan. Hanaoka is the name of one of the places where the forced labourers worked for Kajima Group (Kajima Construction Ltd today, a construction giant in Japan). Some labourers, led by a POW called Geng Chun, launched an unsuccessful rebellion on the site.

55 Major lawyers are from the All-China Lawyers Association, the official bar association. In recent years, another lawyer with little governmental background took over the case, which has become hopeless.

56 Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), p. 132. One of the leading lawyers in Hanaoka case is the chair of the local Japan–China Friendship Association (interview); other activists, including a Chinese living in Japan, also have unusual connections with the Chinese government. See a recently set up website devoted to the Hanaoka incident (http://www.hanaoka.org/show.php?tid=454) to get a sense of the connection. Also see n. 58.

57 "Foreign Affairs spokesman comments on Hanaoka agreement," Xinhua News Agency, 30 November 2000.

58 See http://japan.people.com.cn/Zhuanti/Zhuanti_43.htm for a series of debate documents. Also see an article published by one of the major lawyers working for reparations: Guan Jianqiang, "The civil reparations claims against Japan: reconcilement is no substitute for apology," *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 30 September 2004. Also, on the email list of Wang Xuan there are many debates about the issue. Some emails directly question the intention of the "Chinese Japanese leader" who actively participated. The debate is still going on.

59 On 4 August 2003, several construction workers in Qiqihaer accidentally discovered a number of poisonous gas bombs abandoned by the Imperial Army. The gas leaked out and caused severe damage to

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Weapon Convention. Following an investigation and diplomatic bargaining, a certain amount of "console money" was paid by the Japanese state, but no lawsuit was filed. The money was paid directly to a state-owned hospital to treat victims. Some victims and activists, however, complained that the hospital deliberately raised its fees to an abnormal level to make extra profits.[60] After the fund was exhausted, the Chinese state decided to withdraw because the political goal had been achieved via the console fund. Although the state continued to publicize the case and made it a high-profile one, it did not plan to file a lawsuit for victims who still suffered from the disease and were unable to work. Some Japanese and Chinese lawyers helped the victims sue the Japanese government, but their mobilization was restricted. One of the lawyers sometimes had to use her own money to finance the case, but she became less involved after she was diagnosed with heart disease.[61] No SMO was founded, and all the cases were rejected because the Japanese court claimed the agreement between the two states had already settled the issue.

In sum, the two cases backed by the central government developed poorly. Without the victims' own SMO and strong activists, the state's intervention facilitated the political manoeuvring of the Chinese state and the Japanese leftists in the Hanaoka case, and of both Chinese and Japanese states in the chemical weapon case. As a result, the government's strong support discouraged participation from civil society and finally led to the cases' ill-development.

The Chongqing bombing case: suppression

The Chongqing sector could have been influential. As a result of the Japanese Imperial Army's long-term indiscriminate air raids during the war, the victims were numerous. Chongqing residents enthusiastically supported the litigation and investigation. At an early stage, there were more than 30 regular members of the SMO. Although the issue was publicized in 2001, no lawsuit was filed until 2006. The SMO suffered from constant internal conflicts, which finally led to organizational paralysis and grave financial problems.[62] Why did this SMO with a considerable number of participants not succeed?

After analysing different parties in the sector, we conclude that the poor development was the result of problems in the interactions between the state and the

footnote continued

the workers' bodies. The incident incurred a large-scale online name-signing protest against Japan. See http://bbs.1931-9-18.org/viewthread.php?tid=22454 for information.

60 Interviews with BJ-1, a lawyer for chemical weapon and forced labourers, 25 June 2007, with HLJ-1, a lawyer/activist for chemical weapon victims, 8 July 2007.

61 Interview with HLJ-1, this lawyer, 8 July 2007.

62 The SMO's office was provided by a Taiwanese merchant, but the SMO even had trouble paying utilities, which amounted to only 1,200 yuan (approximately $160) per month (interview with CQ-3, a leading activist, 3 June 2007).

movement, which finally led the local government to change its attitude from exploitation to suppression. The conflicts between the movement and the local government had existed from the movement's inception. The case was started by a former journalist, who had established an exhibition of the history of the bombing, as well as an informal organization for the victims.[63] Noticing the case's ideological value, the city government soon joined the movement. When a Japanese lawyer approached the victims, the municipal government of Chongqing did not allow the former journalist to meet him. Instead, the History Archives (*Wenshi Guan* 文史馆) arranged his itinerary.[64] The journalist was finally forced to leave the organization. Yet, some activists' resistance checked the municipal government's desire to exploit and infiltrate the movement. They argued that a new participant, endorsed by the government, faked evidence to claim that he was a "victim" and tried to seize power over the organization. One of the major activists/victims, G, faithfully wrote letters to the central government, urging the relevant bureaus to change their foreign policies towards Japan.[65] The central government was apparently annoyed and ordered the local government to trim the movement. Under pressure, the local government went even further: all Chongqing government-owned media were ordered not to report on the bombing reparations issue for a year or so. A lawyer working for the organization revealed another reason for this severe control[66]: several senior victims in the organization and some anti-Japanese veterans wrote a petition to the city government to return the name of a prominent memorial slate located in a main shopping area from the Slate of Liberation of Chongqing People (*Chongqing renmin jiefang jinian bei* 重庆人民解放纪念碑), to the Slate of Anti-Japanese War Victory (*Kangzhan shengli jigong bei* 抗战胜利纪功碑), an old name used by the Nationalist Party, which had designated Chongqing as its wartime capital. These interactions among the local government, the central government and the victims finally led to destructive outcomes: G and some other previous core members had to leave the organization; and the movement suffered from a lack of financial support and internal conflicts.

The "comfort women" case and the Nanjing Massacre: control and takeover

Cases do not always neatly match ideal types. The case of the "comfort women"[67] is a combination of "takeover" and "control" instead of a single interaction pattern. This is because of the division within the sector: lawyers from the

63 Interview with CQ-7, this early activist, 5 June 2007.
64 *Ibid*.
65 This information was obtained from copies of the letters this man gave the first author when he was in the field.
66 Interview with CQ-4, this lawyer, 4 June 2007.
67 The term "comfort women" was a euphemism that refers to young females from Korea, China, and South-East Asia who were forced and deceived to provide sex services to the Japanese troops during the Second World War. See Chungmoo Choi, *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War and Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

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All-China Lawyers' Associations were in charge of litigation, while historians in Shanghai focused on collecting oral histories. In the litigation part, the state–society interaction followed the same "takeover" pattern as in the forced labourers case.[68] Thus the litigation did not turn into an influential movement. In the oral history part, a historian in Shanghai, his colleagues and students have been undertaking the oral history project for almost a decade. However, his social position as a history professor in a state-owned university brought him hassles and surveillance. In July 2007, Yiwu's SMO and his research centre co-sponsored a bacterial warfare reparations conference, which the first author attended. Yet the university made a last-minute call to the historian, asking him to change the meeting venue to somewhere off-campus, because the university "didn't want to have trouble." Other controls are soft, such as subsidizing the research centre but making sure the professor's agenda will not deviate from the official one. The effects of the "control" approach were similar to those of takeover and suppression, but slightly better. The small group of historians and volunteers continued to function, but probably more in the form of scholarly research than as a social movement.

The Nanjing Massacre is a "negative case" in which there was no reparations movement. In contrast to the Massacre's publicity and large number of victims, the absence of a reparations movement is conspicuous. The reason for this is similar to the reason for the chemical weapon case: the high degree of governmental involvement excluded the possibility of civil society participation. A large-scale official memorial was set up as early as the mid-1980s.[69] The memorial and its affiliated institutions monopolized the available commemorative resources for the issue. Consequently, no movement was launched.

Conclusion

In sum, our research on the CWRM has proposed and illustrated a "dynamic statism" that emphasizes variations and dynamics of the state–society relationship at different levels and in various contexts. These variations, we argue, were caused by the Chinese state's ambivalent attitude towards this ideologically useful yet institutionally troublesome movement. Thus local governments had considerable leeway to choose the most convenient or advantageous strategies. We demonstrate that both strong repression and facilitation discouraged participation in the movement. Official war memories are translated into collective political actions only in the contexts where the movement is relatively independent of or has a co-operative relationship with the government. In both cases, local communities and informal networks play a significant role in mobilizing resources.

68 In fact, the major lawyer working on the case was the same one as for the forced labourers' case.
69 The website of this memorial: http://www.nj1937.org/.

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The findings of this study can enrich our understanding of memory politics and nationalism in contemporary China. Without denying the state's hegemonic use of war memory, this study provides a nuanced and dynamic picture of state–society interactions, which generate variations of memory politics at the local level. It also contributes to our knowledge about Chinese politics and social movements in general. The recent decades have witnessed a rise of new social movements, whose ideological claims are useful for the state but whose collective actions pose a potential threat to "political stability," the state's top concern. Another prominent example is the environmental movement, which demonstrates similar ambivalence and interaction patterns between local governments and the movement.[70] As Chinese society becomes increasingly diverse, we expect that more social movements with non-oppositional claims will arise. We hope the mechanisms theorized in this article provide a base for future research.

70 Yang Guobin, "Environmental NGOs and institutional dynamics in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 181 (2005), pp. 46–66; Yanfei Sun and Dingxin Zhao, "State–society relations and environmental campaigns," in Kevin O'Brien (ed.), *Popular Protest in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 144–62.